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Indian Ocean Earthquake and Tsunamis: Food Aid Needs and the U.S. Response

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Summary

On December 26, 2004, an undersea earthquake of magnitude 9.0 off the coast of Aceh Province (Sumatra) in Indonesia set off a series of large tsunamis across the Indian Ocean region.¹ In all, 12 countries were hit by wave surges, with the brunt of the impact in coastal communities in Indonesia, the Maldives, Sri Lanka, and Thailand. The death toll has been estimated at 140,000-200,000. It is believed that between 3 and 5 million people have been affected, including those displaced, or who have lost their homes and livelihoods. An estimated 2 million people are in urgent need of food aid. Thus far, the United States, other countries, and international organizations have pledged over \$4 billion in emergency assistance. The U.S. pledged contribution, including food aid valued at \$34.5 million, currently stands at \$350 million. The President requested, on February 14, 2005, an additional \$701 million in supplemental appropriations for tsunami relief, some of which could be used for food aid.

Prior to the Indian Ocean disaster, U.S. and global food aid resources were facing considerable demand for emergency food aid to respond to urgent needs, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. Congress may be confronted with a number of interrelated food aid issues early in the 109th Congress, including reconciling emergency and non-emergency uses of food aid, determining the U.S. share of global food aid for tsunami victims as well as other food-insecure people in Africa and elsewhere, and funding alternatives for U.S. emergency and non-emergency food aid. This report will be updated.

Food Needs as Estimated by the World Food Program

The World Food Program (WFP), the food aid agency of the United Nations, uses food to respond to urgent humanitarian need and to support economic and social development projects. WFP relies on donor contributions of food commodities or cash

¹ For details on the scope and impact of the Indian Ocean disaster and information about U.S. and other donor responses, see CRS Report RL32715, *Indian Ocean Earthquake and Tsunami: Humanitarian Assistance and Relief Operations*.

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to its relief and development activities. The WFP has conducted an assessment of the food aid needs resulting from the Indian Ocean disaster and is appealing for donor contributions to meet the estimated need.²

WFP's Initial Response and Appeal. WFP's initial response to the disaster was to provide immediate food assistance in the affected countries over a two- to three-week period following the disaster. Using available funds (\$1.9 million), WFP provided food to an estimated 600,000 people. Where available, WFP purchased local food, but fortified foods were quickly airlifted to the region. Food stocks in the various countries destined for WFP development projects were reallocated to emergency relief. WFP shipments on the high seas were diverted to countries affected by the disaster.

The WFP Appeal. On January 6, 2005, in conjunction with an international donors conference in Jakarta, Indonesia, WFP announced a \$256 million appeal to provide emergency food assistance to victims of the Indian Ocean disaster.³ WFP estimates that 169,000 metric tons of food, valued at \$185 million, will be needed to feed 2 million people over six months (January to June 2005; see **Table 1**). The targeted beneficiaries, according to WFP, are poor and vulnerable people already living in extreme poverty. They include displaced people, those who lost their houses and/or means of livelihood and other productive assets, and children who lost parents and families. WFP notes that the estimated numbers are provisional and that the actual caseload could be lower. In addition, to address logistical, transport, and communications difficulties faced by "the entire humanitarian community" across the region, WFP has requested \$71 million. As donors respond, WFP will publish (at [<http://www.wfp.org>]) updates on donor contributions.

Table 1. Beneficiaries by Country of the WFP Emergency Food Aid Appeal

Indonesia	1,000,000
Sri Lanka	750,000
Maldives	50,000
Other/Contingency	200,000
Total	2,000,000

Source: See footnote 2.

Of the total estimated food needs of 169,000 metric tons, rice, at an estimated 125,820 metric tons, is the largest single component (see **Table 2**). However, WFP notes that some of Sri Lanka's estimated need for rice (49,900 metric tons) may be replaced by wheat and wheat flour. The next largest component is canned fish, at 9,450 metric tons.

² The WFP assessment and appeal, "Assistance to Tsunami Victims in Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Maldives and other Countries in the Indian Ocean Region," January 6, 2005, can be viewed at [<http://www.wfp.org>].

³ See WFP press release, January 6, 2005, "WFP appeals for U.S. \$256 million to feed 2 million hit by Asian Tsunami," at [<http://www.wfp.org>]. The international donors conference is discussed in CRS Report RL32715.

Other commodities include pulses, sugar, and vegetable oil. A combined total of 17,000 metric tons of various fortified foods (biscuits, noodles, and blended foods) is also included.

**Table 2. Total WFP-Estimated Food Needs
by Country and Commodity**

	Indonesia	Sri Lanka	Maldives	Other countries/ contingencies***	Total
Beneficiaries	1,000,000	750,000	50,000	200,000	2,000,000
Total MT	95,940	61,225	4,230	7,920	169,315
Rice	72,000	45,900*	3,600	4,320	125,820
Pulses		6,885		648	7,533
Sugar		2,700**			2,700
Canned Fish	9,000		450		9,450
Veg. Oil	3,600	2,700**		216	6,516
Fortified Foods	11,340	3,040	180	2,736	17,296

Source: See footnote 2.

* Some rice may be replaced by wheat/wheat flour.

** Calculated for the entire caseload.

*** Includes, as contingency, an estimated 30,000 people in Myanmar (Burma) and 140,000 in other countries.

The U.S. Food Aid Response

The United States has traditionally been the major provider of emergency food aid during international humanitarian disasters. For example, in response to Hurricane Mitch, which wiped out both food supplies and the food distribution system in Honduras and in several other Central American countries in 1998, the United States provided \$67 million of P.L. 480 Title II emergency food aid (from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)), along with \$63 million of commodity donations (from the U.S. Department of Agriculture). Food aid accounted for 42% of the total U.S. emergency response to Hurricane Mitch of \$308.4 million.

As of February 11, 2005, the United States has pledged about \$34.5 million of emergency food aid to several of the affected countries (see **Table 3**). In addition to food aid provided via U.S. food aid programs, some Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance funds (OFDA is a component of the U.S. Agency for International Development [USAID]) have been used for transport and/or purchase of emergency food supplies,

usually in conjunction with the provision of a range of other relief supplies, including, in addition to food, water, medicine, sanitation supplies, blankets, tents, etc.⁴

Most of the U.S. food aid for tsunami victims has been provided by way of P.L. 480 Title II (humanitarian donations), although a substantial amount of food aid has also come from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). P.L. 480 Title II is the main program vehicle for responding to food emergencies, although USDA's Section 416(b) donations, when available from commodity surpluses, can also be used for emergency food aid. The Bill Emerson Humanitarian Trust, a reserve of commodities and cash, can also be tapped in emergencies when P.L. 480 Title II resources are unavailable.⁵ No commodities or cash from the Emerson Trust have as yet been released for tsunami relief. USAID has not reported on the extent to which food aid already allocated to development projects in the affected countries has been diverted to emergency relief. It is likely that some portion of the initial response is from such reallocations.

Table 3. U.S. Emergency Food Aid to Indian Ocean Countries

Country	U.S. food aid program	Amount
Indonesia	3,000 MT of P.L. 480 Title II emergency food aid	\$2,438,587
Indonesia	Emergency food assistance	\$99,974
Indonesia	9,417 MT of Section 416(b) Title I emergency food aid	\$7,533,600
Sri Lanka	18,220 MT of P.L. 480 Title II emergency food assistance	\$20,028,340
Sri Lanka	5,583 MT of Section 416(b) Title I emergency food aid	\$4,466,400
Total		\$34,466,900

Source: USAID, Indian Ocean: Earthquake and Tsunamis, Fact Sheet #33, Fiscal Year (FY) 2005, February 2005. (USAID frequently updates its fact sheets on the U.S. response to the Indian Ocean disaster, including food aid provided, and publishes them at [http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/humanitarian_assistance/disaster_assistance/countries/indian_ocean/et_index.html].)

Issues for Congress

Competition for U.S. Food Aid Resources. The need for food aid to respond to the earthquake and tsunamis in the Indian Ocean region comes at a time when there are already large demands for U.S. food aid resources to respond to other emergencies. Even before the Indian Ocean disaster, U.S. private voluntary organizations and others had pointed out that food aid allocations to emergency food aid in Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and elsewhere had reduced the food available for non-emergency or developmental food

⁴ See CRS Report RS32715 for other U.S. agency contributions, including, e.g., the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD).

⁵ See CRS Report RS21234, *The Bill Emerson Humanitarian Trust: Background and Current Issues*.

aid projects.⁶ USAID's allocation of food aid to emergency and non-emergency activities for FY2005 (which the 2002 farm bill — P.L. 107.171 — requires be made by December of each fiscal year) shows, of \$1.173 billion total for P.L. 480 Title II in FY2005, \$668 million allocated to emergencies, \$462 million to non-emergency or development activities, and \$33 million as yet unallocated. Accounting for the availability of U.S. and other donor food aid contributions, WFP had estimated, prior to the tsunami disaster, a global shortfall of \$1.3 billion in emergency food needs.

What Should Be the U.S. Share? Historically, the United States has been the world's largest provider of food aid, both emergency and non-emergency. There is no established rule as to what proportion of food aid needs should be provided by the United States, yet there is a presumption that, especially in the case of emergencies, the United States will make a substantial, and most likely the largest, contribution. There are some historical indicators of the relative importance of U.S. food aid contributions.⁷ In the 1990s, the United States provided just over 55% of total world food aid. The U.S. contribution to all WFP activities both emergency and non-emergency during the 1990s averaged 46.5%. Under the Food Aid Convention (FAC), an international agreement, now expired, that constituted a framework for cooperation on food aid among major donor countries, the United States had pledged to meet 51% of the total pledge of 4.9 million metric tons. The FAC pledge did not represent actual food aid shipments, but was rather a minimum commitment. The European Union (EU) is the next largest contributor of food aid globally, providing 28% of all food aid during the 1990s, 31% of total contributions to the WFP, and 27% of commitments under the FAC.

In terms of contributions to the WFP for recent food emergencies, during 2003 and 2004, the United States provided 64% of total emergency food aid to Ethiopia; 28% of total emergency food aid to the Democratic Republic of Korea; and thus far has pledged about one-quarter of the emergency food aid called for by WFP for Western Sudan (Darfur) and Eastern Chad.

Funding Issues. Congress and the Administration are likely to be confronted with the challenge of funding additional food aid along with other relief and development assistance for the Indian Ocean disaster early in the 109th Congress.⁸ In the short term, the Administration can reallocate non-emergency food aid to emergency relief. In addition, the 2002 farm bill authorization for P.L. 480 food aid allows for some transfer of food aid from P.L. 480 Title I (concessional sales) to Title II. In order to provide food aid to Indian Ocean countries as well as to displaced persons and refugees in Darfur, Sudan, and elsewhere, additional funds will be needed. The President's FY2005 supplemental request for \$81.5 billion for wartime expenditures in Iraq and Afghanistan, transmitted to Congress on February 14, includes also \$150 million for emergency food needs in Sudan (Darfur province) and \$701 million for tsunami relief, some of which can be used for P.L. 480 Title II food aid.

⁶ See, for example, Food Aid Cuts Jeopardize Programs that Help Break Cycle of Poverty Overseas, Press Release, Catholic Relief Services, December 22, 2004 at [https://www.catholicrelief.org/about_us/newsroom/press_releases/releases.cfm?ID=251].

⁷ CRS Report RS21279, *International Food Aid: U.S. and Other Donor Contributions*.

⁸ See "Tsunami Aid and Reconstruction Issues" in CRS Report RL32715.

Concerns about meeting food aid emergencies could result in an examination of the role of the Emerson Trust of commodities and cash, which is intended to provide food aid when Title II food aid is unavailable. The trust, which can hold 4 million metric tons of wheat, corn, sorghum, and rice, now holds just 1.4 million metric tons of wheat and around \$89 million in cash. In the conference report accompanying FY2005 agriculture appropriations, Congress admonished the Administration not to use non-emergency food aid funds for emergency purposes and indicated that the Emerson Trust should be relied upon to meet unanticipated emergency needs (p. 667, H.Rept. 108-792, P.L. 108-477). Without replenishment of the commodities in the trust and/or augmentation of its cash reserves, however, the trust could not make a major contribution to meeting future (or even near-term) emergency food needs.

In a letter dated January 14, 2005, a number of U.S. Senators asked the President to include in an FY2005 supplemental appropriations request for Iraq and Afghanistan a request for food aid to help tsunami victims, address the global food aid shortfall generated by pre-tsunami food emergencies, reimburse recent releases from the Emerson Trust, and restore previous allocations to developmental food aid programs.⁹

⁹ Letter to President Bush, dated January 14, 2005, from Senators Roberts and Harkin and 41 other Senators, viewed at [<http://harkin.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=230668>].